

About the piece

Theme and Variations after “Alle Menschen müssen sterben” is a set of choral variations for organ after the choral BWV 262 by Johann Sebastian Bach. The choral set as a theme for the variations was chosen because of its lyrics which, being the piece instrumental music, must be given as an extra musical element that is this text, and whose roughly translation would be:

Alle Menschen müssen sterben, / Alles Fleisch vergeht wie Heu; / Was da lebet, muß verderben, / Soll es anders werden neu. / Dieser Leib, der muß verwesen, / Wenn er anders soll genesen.

Everybody must die, / all flesh passes like grass; / Whatever lives must perish / if it is to become new elsewhere. / This body must rot / if it is elsewhere to recover.

This little text presents a conceptual framework for the piece, based on the Latin idiom *ex nihilo, nihil fit*, or “nothing comes from nothing”. Applied to music and arts overall, this sentence invites us to reflect about the heritage we carry with us, treated as a burden or as a support depending on our specific historical conditions. The remaining question is how such heritage is pushed beyond by artists and why.